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**Stronger Storytelling with Museums and Theatre**

Elizabeth Nowak

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Museums and theatres both tell stories, but through different means. Museums highlight objects, while theatrical performances feature actors. Combining museum and theatre concepts has benefits. Museum professionals Niki Nikonanou and Foteini Venieri of the University of Thessaly have researched how bringing theatre into museums has been used to vocalize sensitive issues of a multicultural society and marginalized social communities. Theatre performances in museums are more common than exhibits paired with performances. In fact, the International Museum Theatre Alliance mission highlights their focus on the use of theatre in museums rather than exhibits with performances. There are comparatively few examples of museum exhibits pairing with theatrical performances. When they do appear, they are not curated by museum professionals. This drove me to ask the question, how can a museum exhibit in the lobby of a theatre affect the audience’s understanding of the play? To answer this question, I curated the exhibit "Double Standards of Witchcraft Accusations", while also serving as dramaturg for NIU’s production of Witch by Jen Silverman, a feminist retelling of The Witch of Edmonton, a 400-year-old play inspired by real events. After viewing the exhibit, audience members were encouraged to complete a survey evaluating their experience and understanding of the play and its context.

**Methods**

- **Dramaturgy**
  - Dramaturgy is the research of the history and context of a play
  - To relay information to cast, director, crew and the theatre going public.
- **Curation**
  - Used dramaturgy research to curate the exhibit "Double Standards of Witchcraft Accusations."
  - Established narrative
  - Selected objects
  - Created supporting text
- **Survey**
  - Asked audience members quantitative and qualitative questions
  - QR code to Jotform

**Key Findings**

- **89%** of those surveyed recognized objects on display were similar to the props onstage
  - Audience members understood connection between play and exhibit
  - Most recognized object was the broom
    - An important part of the exhibit narrative
  - Gave a background
    - Helpful for understanding the play’s themes
- **93%** of those surveyed reported that the exhibit helped them interpret the performance.
- **76%** of those surveyed reported that the broom helped them understand why the character Elizabeth Sawyer was accused of witchcraft.
  - Object in exhibit enhanced understanding of double standards of witchcraft
    - Within the exhibit and play

**Conclusions**

The survey findings suggest that the exhibit positively impacted the audience’s interpretation. Combining historical elements and creative performance can give the audience a more well-rounded and enriching experience. These research findings can be used to promote the curation of museum exhibits for theatrical productions. More research can be conducted to understand the emotional impact museum exhibits can have on theatrical audiences.

**Significance**

Storytelling is powerful. We can tell stories through utilizing both theatre and museum exhibits. The exhibit impacted the audience’s understanding of the play. We can continue to utilize museum exhibits in theatres to tell impactful stories.

**References**